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Oregon's fallen workers remembered

SALEM — The names of 66 Oregon workers and soldiers killed on the job were read at the Fallen Workers Memorial (photo above right) on the Capitol Mall



on April 28 — Workers Memorial Day.

Several family members of the deceased were among more than 100 people who attended the ceremony, which included the Oregon State Defense Force Pipe Band (photo above left).

"Workers Memorial Day is a day to remember those we have lost. But it is also a day to remember that the fight is not over, and to rededicate ourselves to controlling and eliminating the workplace conditions that put our friends and family at risk of serious injury, illness and death," said OR-OSHA Administrator Michael Wood.

On April 26, the Northwest Oregon Labor Council held a memorial prior to its monthly delegates' meeting. Wood spoke at that event, and the Oregon Honor Guard provided military honor services.

Both the Portland and Salem services included a reading of the names of the 66 fallen workers. In Portland, delegates raised a flag in remembrance of each worker. In the photo left, Ed Barnes (foreground), a retired business manager of IBEW Local 48, and Riller Clegg, a member of Machinists Lodge 1005, raise flags.

Workers Memorial Day was enacted by the AFL-CIO in 1989 to serve as a nationwide day of remembrance of the thousands of U.S. workers who die and the more than 1 million who are injured at work each year. April 28 was chosen because on that date in 1970, Congress passed the Occupational Safety and Health Act.

Unions sign project labor agreement for federal building job

The Columbia-Pacific Building and Construction Trades Council (CP-BCTC) and the Northwest Regional Council of the National Construction Alliance II have finalized a project labor agreement (PLA) with Howard S. Wright Constructors on the \$125 million Edith Green-Wendell Wyatt Federal Building "green" remodel in downtown Portland.

Once signed by all parties, it will be the first PLA ever on a federal building construction project in Oregon, according to John Mohlis, executive secretary of the CPBCTC. (A couple of signatures were still needed when this issue went to press.)

A project labor agreement (PLA) is a contract that establishes uniform standards that all unions, prime contractors, and subcontractors — union or nonunion — must conform to on a specific project. PLAs promote economy and efficiency, prevent labor disputes, and ensure compliance with a host of workplace safety and labor laws. They are particularly useful on large, complex construction jobs that require a large number of skilled craft workers, and that are expected to last a long period of time, and on projects that are particularly time-sensitive.

U.S. Labor Secretary Hilda Solis has commented before that PLAs "are a win-win; they benefit businesses, workers and taxpayers."

For political reasons, such agree-

ments were banned by former President George W. Bush via an executive order he made shortly after taking office in 2001. PLAs were reinstated by President Barack Obama in one of his first actions after taking office in 2009. The Obama Administration encourages (it doesn't mandate) the use of PLAs on all federal projects of \$25 million or more.

Soon after Obama's executive order, the General Services Administration (GSA), which manages property for the federal government, identified 10 projects nationwide as candidates for PLAs. The list included the Green-Wyatt building at 1220 SW 3rd Avenue.

Built in 1975, the federal building is an 18-story, 500,000-square-foot office tower, which occupies a full city block and two levels of basement and parking areas. The building was named in honor of former U.S. Representatives from Oregon, Edith Green and Wendell Wyatt.

It was scheduled for a remodel in 2006, but financing fell through. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act — the federal stimulus program — brought the project back to life.

The new structure will be designed into a high-performance green building, with the ability to resist earthquakes and bomb blasts. The goal is to achieve Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) platinum certification.

Starting in late summer or early fall, the building will be stripped to bare iron and retrofitted with a roof-top solar array, low-flow plumbing fixtures, rain-water collectors, double-glazed windows, a new HVA system, and an automatically adjusting lighting system. Vegetated fins on the building will help reduce heat gain in summer, and allow light to come in during the winter.

According to Nelda Wilson, executive assistant for Operating Engineers Local 701, it took eight weeks to negotiate the PLA with Howard S. Wright, which technically is the construction manager as constructor for the project. Local 701 and the Pacific Northwest

Historic workers' comp reform reaches milestone

By **DON McINTOSH**
Associate Editor

SALEM — With Gov. Ted Kulongoski at the 20th anniversary celebration of the Mahonia Hall workers' compensation reforms, it was like old times. Present in the Oregon State Capitol Galleria May 3 were representatives of labor and business, and a crowd of state administrators; absent were chiropractors and trial lawyers, and injured workers.

The reforms were touted as refocus-

ing workers' comp on workers and employers, and reducing the role of "special interests" that had added costs to the system. The results of the reforms — at the time controversial within labor — have been dramatic.

"It has been the greatest success," Kulongoski told celebrants. Since 1990, Oregon's workers' comp premiums have dropped every year but one. Oregon employers pay 60 percent less today than they did 20 years ago.

"Do you know how much money

that is to employers over the last 20 years?" Kulongoski asked. "\$17.5 billion. No other state in the country can claim that statistic."

Twenty years ago, Oregon employers paid the eighth highest workers' comp insurance rates in the nation. The system was breaking down, recalled Bob Shiprack, longtime executive director of the Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council, who took part in crafting the reforms. At the time, Shiprack also was an elected state rep-

resentative from Beavercreek, and chair of the House Labor Committee. Employers paid \$100 in workers' comp premiums for every \$100 in payroll for some occupational classifications. Once injured, workers stayed out for years, sometimes getting addicted to painkillers, Shiprack said, or suffering depression brought on by the joblessness. And there were abuses of the system, including cases of fraud by chiropractors, attorneys and workers.

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